

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

DoD BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE

BARBARA THOMPSON

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PARTICIPANTS:

Moderator:

BRADLEY CANTOR
Department of Defense Public Affairs

Guest:

BARBARA THOMPSON
Director, Office of Family Policy/Children & Youth
Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense
(Military Community and Family Policy)

Other Participants:

TERRI BARNES
Stars and Stripes

AMY BUSHATZ
Military.com, SpouseBUZZ

MICHELE COWELL
MyMilitaryMatters.com

DALE KISSINGER
MilitaryAvenue.com

PHYLLIS ZIMBLER MILLER
PhyllisZimbleMiller.com

AMY POLLING
MyMilitaryLife.com

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PROCEEDINGS

MR. CANTOR: Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, November 13, 2013. My name is Bradley Cantor with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, and I will be moderating our call today.

Today we are honored to have as our guest, Barbara Thompson, Director of the Office of Family Policy and the Children and Youth Office under the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy. Ms. Thompson is here today to discuss several programs the Defense Department is using in order to help our nation's 2.9 million military families.

A note to our bloggers on the line today: Please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question, respect the speaker's time, and keep your questions succinct and to the point. And finally, please remember to mute your phones when you aren't asking a question.

So with that I'd like to turn the conversation over to Barbara Thompson. Ma'am?

MS. THOMPSON: Hi. Thanks, Brad. We really do appreciate the opportunity to share what we're doing to support military families, especially this month because it is the Military Family Month of the year.

I'll take the first question.

MR. CANTOR: Okay, so let's turn it over to the bloggers for questions. We have Michele Cowell up first.

MS. COWELL: Good morning, Barbara, and thank you for joining us today. I would like to know with respect to Military OneSource your resources that are reaching out for the families overall, but some of the programs that you're offering through Military OneSource?

MS. THOMPSON: Oh, great. Military OneSource is our 24/7 online and call opportunities for military families regardless of their activation status. I think it's really important to know about the nonmedical counseling. We offer both face-to-face, telephonic, and Web-based nonmedical counseling for those day-to-day life issues that impact all of us as we try to communicate well with our partners and our families. And they also offer financial counseling, which is a big -- I think a big thing in today's economic turmoil with the budget cuts and things that are happening -- to know that we have certified financial counselors who are available again telephonically or face to face to offer that service free of charge to our military members and their families.

Another really great initiative is the coaching, the wellness coaching. I

think that's one that's under-utilized and one that really would support our families' well-being, whether it's something on weight management or getting more physical activity or, again, stress management. Those things would really be helpful to know that you have somebody to call to first of all figure out your baseline assessment and then set goals, and then have a coach who's there to encourage you to meet those goals. So I think that's another really great program that Military OneSource offers.

We're a little early, but pretty soon tax season will be here. So there's, again, tax counseling on Military OneSource depending on your status and what kind of form you're using, a lot of it you can file with them for free. So I think it's, again, another great tangible, concrete, way to support military families.

MS. COWELL: Do you use the Military OneSource as one of your first points of connection?

MS. THOMPSON: Absolutely. We look at Military OneSource as offering not only high tech, but also high touch. And while Military OneSource augments what our family programs are doing on the installation, it is really the accessibility. And we know military families are very busy and you may not have time to go on the installation and visit your family center or it might not be open when you need it. So that's where this 24/7 wherever you are around the world is available to you. So I would suggest it as one of the primary sources of support.

MS. COWELL: Very good. Thank you very much.

MS. THOMPSON: You're welcome.

MR. CANTOR: Great. One quick thing before we continue. It looks like we have three more callers join the line since it started. Can we get a list of those people?

MS. BUSHATZ: Amy Bushatz with military.com. I'm so sorry. I was having some trouble connecting.

MR. CANTOR: No problem. What else, who else, called in?

MS. BARNES: Terri Barnes from *Stars and Stripes*.

MR. CANTOR: Okay, anybody else? Okay, great. So the next blogger up is Phyllis Zimble Miller.

MS. MILLER: Hi, just to explain. I got kicked off and had to come back

in. So what I would like to know is could you take us through what happens when someone calls Military OneSource, a spouse, and says I think my husband or my wife is suffering from PTSD trauma. He or she will not get help. What do I do?

MS. THOMPSON: The people who answer the phones are licensed and clinicians' masters level, so they would know how to refer that person to additional support through the health affairs system. But they would also be able to advise them on how to handle their emotions, how to handle their challenges when dealing with a service member who may be suffering from PTSD, and, again, the life coaching on how to encourage our service members to seek help and to realize that it's okay to ask for help. I think sometimes when you're in that situation and you know what may be best for your loved one, but you might not have the right words to use, I think it's important to try to figure out how you can connect your service members to that support.

MS. MILLER: Okay, but then what happens? How long is the wait at the VA or wherever to get help? That's the really important question.

MS. THOMPSON: Well, that goes beyond my scope of responsibilities because once it is not a nonmedical counseling endeavor, so I really don't have any -- we try to support the person by giving them a warm handoff to a military treatment facility, to a VA call center, or to local resources. But, again, it's -- all I can do is try to connect. We can't control what is available in the community or at the MTF or VA.

MS. MILLER: I see. Okay, thank you.

MS. THOMPSON: You're welcome.

MR. CANTOR: Great. Thanks for the question. The next blogger up is Dale Kissinger.

MR. KISSINGER: Good afternoon, Ms. Thompson. This is Dale Kissinger from MilitaryAvenue.com. I just wanted to say thank you for taking the time today. My question concerns the Military Family Appreciation Month. What is DoD doing this month to show appreciation for all of our families that serve?

MS. THOMPSON: Oh, I think DoD goes beyond the month, but this is a special recognition for the sacrifice and the support that our families provide our troops. We say they're the force behind the force, and without a doubt as I said in

my beginning statement that families also serve. And I think what we want to see is at the local level where the families are. So at military installations you'll see things as discounted opportunities at morale, welfare, and recreation activities so that families have an opportunity to have fun and be together. You'll see opportunities through our chapels, through our family centers, through our child development and youth programs recognizing each member of that family and what they provide to our military community.

And I think this is a special time for our commanders to open up their homes to military families and provide special recognition to recognize the needs and what the military families give back to their military community on a day-to-day basis.

MR. KISSINGER: Okay, thank you very much. And I notice that the Marine Corps Commandant had his home open. Was that part of this month?

MS. THOMPSON: Absolutely.

MR. KISSINGER: Okay, thank you.

MR. CANTOR: Okay, next blogger up is Wendy Polling.

MS. POLLING: Yes, hi, good afternoon, again. This is Wendy Polling with My Military Life and Military Life Radio. Thanks for taking my question. I'm just curious in terms of operational command, how are you guys working with commanders and unit leaders on using them to get the word out on reaching military families and engaging them to use these programs that you're talking about today?

MS. THOMPSON: That's a really important point, Wendy, because really families belong to that military community. And when commanders are unaware of the resources and support available as they try to help military families navigate the challenges of the military lifestyle, it doesn't help if they don't have any tools in their toolbox. And so we have an actual leadership focus on Military OneSource so that they're aware of the resources that are available.

And each of the military services provides briefings to the different levels of leadership schools so that as an NCO and as a military commander is working their way through their promotion channels that they're given different levels of information that supports them in their support of military members and their families from the family aspect.

MS. POLLING: Okay, thank you.

MS. THOMPSON: You're welcome.

MR. CANTOR: All right. Up next we have Amy Bushatz.

MS. BUSHATZ: This is Amy Bushatz. Thank you so much for taking my question. I was hoping that you could talk a little bit about what the DoD Family Policy Office is doing to help spouses as they look towards transition. My husband is in the infantry, and we're hearing some buzz just on my level from his career that a lot of people who weren't necessarily interested in getting out of the military are going to be getting out of the military whether they like it or not, and I know this is true across the military.

And so I know that spouses can attend the transition classes with their husbands, if they want to or with their service member if they want to, but I'm wondering if there's anything in addition that you guys recommend or that you have that I can tell my readers about for spouses to help them with the transition back to civilian life?

MS. THOMPSON: Absolutely. I think one of our most promising practices is our Military Spouse Employment Partnership. We really believe that if the spouse has an opportunity for career advancement and job opportunities, they will be the glue to support the transition of our service members back into the civilian community.

So we're placing a special emphasis on transitioning spouses to ensure that they are aware of not only the Military Spouse Employment Partnership, but also all of the benefits that the Spouse Employment and Career Opportunities -- myseco.mil -- offers regardless of where you are in your stage of your military career. If you're just starting a career or you've been out of it for a while because you've been taking care of your family and now it's time to get back into your career to support the transition of your family into the civilian community, for all of those different touch points there are different resources available through that initiative.

I think that there's a specific office set up in the Pentagon for transition, and we have started working with them to see how we can expand what we offer in our family support centers to look at the specific needs of transitioning spouses. As I said earlier, our spouses are the force behind the force and the more that we can support you as you're looking at this new stage in your life -- because it's going to be a transition for you, too -- the more you will be able to support your service member.

And so that's an excellent question and one that has a lot of interest in Military Community and Family Policy so that we can really be on the cutting edge to make sure that you have all of the tools in your toolbox to make sure that your transition is as smooth and is as successful as it can possibly be.

MS. BUSHATZ: Thank you so much.

MR. CANTOR: Okay, we have the last blogger who signed on and that's Terri Barnes. Is there anybody else that hasn't asked a question yet besides Terri Barnes? Okay, great, so up next is Terri Barnes.

MS. BARNES: Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Thompson, for being here to answer our questions. My question is the programs throughout the military are feeling the impact of the ongoing sequester as well as the chilling effect of the government shutdown that we've just experienced. What can the DoD do to minimize this impact on family programs, and how are you in your office prioritizing the spending of the funds that are available for families to deal with all these issues that we've been talking about today?

MS. THOMPSON: Great. You know, it has been a challenge to make sure that the doors are open and people are in place to support military families during very tough times. And I know the services in particular are looking at prioritizing and making sure that what we continue to provide is effective and there's evidence that it has an impact on the well-being of military members and their families.

So one of the things we're doing is we've embarked on a five-year evaluation plan to be able to assess the evidence behind the effectiveness of our program and the impacts of our program. Over the last 12 years we've been very focused on pushing out programs and support to military members and their families, and now we've had to step back and say okay, what is working? What is really making a difference in the lives of our military families? What do we need to continue to provide? And how do we leverage technology and what's offered in the community?

As I mentioned earlier, so many of our military families live off the installations and our military families are integral members of that community. How can we partner with community support systems so that they are aware of the needs of military families and we do not duplicate our efforts, but we synergize our efforts and work together?

MS. BARNES: And what tools are you using to judge that evidence or to evaluate the evidence or the results of those programs?

MS. THOMPSON: So we have an evaluation project for a few of our programs, not all of our programs. We're looking at our spouse employment program. We're looking at nonmedical counseling. We're working with Penn State University to develop logic models to get programs ready for evaluation,

which would include the new parent support program, our personal financial readiness program, and I think there's one more that's off the top of my head that I'm not remembering. But we've targeted specific programs to look at them.

MS. BARNES: Through surveys or --

MS. THOMPSON: No, through -- we're looking at research. We want to make sure -- you know, we do surveys with our military families, but mostly those are usage and satisfaction. We're trying to now measure the impact of these programs. So, for example, if it's personal financial counseling, did it make a difference in your financial stability or is it just nice to have? We want to make sure that what we're offering has direct impact on the well-being of the force.

MS. BARNES: Okay, thank you very much.

MR. CANTOR: Okay, any other bloggers have follow-up questions? All right. So with that, I'd like to ask Ms. Thompson if she has any wrap-up statements.

MS. THOMPSON: I just really appreciate the way you have garnered your communities and you're giving them some really important information. I think that's one of our frustrations at the DoD level, at the OSD level, that we don't have that reach to the family members and the service members like you do. And so the more that you are aware of the resources and can be that trusting source for that information and the message that it is really okay to ask for help, that's why we have the family readiness system in place, I think that would be really powerful. And I think the more we know our families are resilient and we know they're resourceful and we know that they are strong, and sometimes they just need a little extra support. And when they know about the resource and they utilize it, they then become another trusted avenue of sharing that resource with other military families.

So thank you for what you do day in and day out to get this information into the hands of our spouses and our family members and our service members.

MR. CANTOR: Thank you, ma'am. So today's program will be available online at DoDLive.mil where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call along with source documents such as this audio file and a printed transcript.

Again, thank you to Barbara Thompson and our bloggers for the great questions. This concludes today's event. Feel free to disconnect at this time. Goodbye.

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